

STATEMENT

OF

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MIAMI DISTRICT**

BEFORE THE

**SENATE COMMERCE SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE TRANSPORTATION AND MERCHANT
MARINE**

REGARDING

PASSENGER PROCESSING AT THE SEAPORT

**FIELD HEARING
JANUARY 9, 2002 – PORT EVERGLADES, FL**

MR. CHAIRMAN, thank you for inviting me here today to address you on behalf of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). I am pleased to appear before you today with two of our sister agencies – the Customs Service and the Coast Guard – to discuss port security issues.

The Miami District Office has developed and maintained several aggressive enforcement operations aimed at deterring illegal alien smuggling through our ports-of-entry. One of our most significant actions to date has been the establishment of terminal inspections operations at the Miami seaport. This initiative, developed with cooperation between industry and the INS, greatly enhances our ability to deter conventional criminal activity, and to address increased security threats this nation now faces.

The Miami seaport has become the first in the United States to begin processing cruise vessels at a specifically designated terminal-based federal inspection site. In short, the new facilities were designed to resemble international airport-style inspection areas. This new approach has allowed us to increase our enforcement efforts, as arriving cruise ship passengers are now more thoroughly inspected by INS personnel. The result is a more secure federal inspection site that is enhancing our enforcement efforts while at the same time facilitating travel.

Before I discuss in greater detail our actions and accomplishments with regard to cruiseship passenger processing and the similar efforts underway at other INS seaports in Florida, I would like to provide you with an overview of the Miami District Office.

MIAMI DISTRICT OVERVIEW

The Miami District is composed of five branches: Adjudications, Investigations,

Detention and Removal, Inspections, and Management. All the branches have a specialized role in enforcing the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Our area of responsibility consists of the entire state of Florida and inspections pre-clearance facilities at three locations in the Bahamas. The District is headquartered in the northern-most area of the City of Miami. Approximately 300 of the District's 1,200 government employees and 200 contract employees are assigned to the headquarters complex.

The remainder of the District's employees and contractors are assigned to three sub-offices located in Orlando, Tampa and Jacksonville; the pre-clearance facilities in the Bahamas; a naturalization office in Miami; 16 ports-of-entry; a satellite office in West Palm Beach; a service processing center; and five application support centers in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

Our Adjudications section operates out of the main district office in Miami and a naturalization office in downtown Miami. We also undertake a full range of adjudication services in our offices in Orlando, Tampa, Jacksonville and West Palm Beach. The two principle types of applications we processed are for permanent residence status and for citizenship.

The Investigations Division in the District staffs offices in Miami, and sub-offices located in Jacksonville, Orlando and Tampa. The District supports the INS interior enforcement strategy by focusing resources in areas that provide a visible positive impact. The major thrust of the enforcement unit focuses on the identification and removal of incarcerated criminal aliens, and in identifying, arresting, prosecuting and dismantling criminal organizations that traffic in human cargo and obtain immigration benefits and documents illegally. Additionally, the District supports specialty units such as the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force, Joint Terrorism Task Force, Violent Gang Task Force and Anti-Smuggling Unit which focus on specific enforcement activities and coordinate with other federal, state, and local law

enforcement entities.

In fiscal year 2001, the District continued to maintain an aggressive posture on locating and removing criminal aliens. As a result, the Detention and Removal Operations Division removed 2,255 criminal aliens from the United States. In addition to our focus on enforcement efforts, our success is also attributed to our active campaign with foreign government officials to expedite the delivery of travel documents to criminal aliens from countries such as Haiti and Jamaica.

The Miami District has also maintained its focus on enhancing the management and operations of the Krome Service Processing Center – our principal detention center in the District. Efforts to more efficiently manage that facility date back to 1996, highlighted by the then-District Director’s assessment that the continued detention at Krome of unaccompanied minors, family units, and females, was not in the best interest of the detainees or the Service. The District worked aggressively to relocate unaccompanied minors, as evidenced by our current agreement with Catholic Charities to use the Boystown facility in Miami-Dade County. We then continued these efforts to the next level by removing family units from the Krome facility. Today, family units are held in more appropriate conditions of detention at a local hotel. In December 2000, we completed another phase of this effort by permanently relocating the Krome female detainee population to the Turner-Guilford-Knight (TGK) Correctional Center in Miami.

PASSENGER PROCESSING

A significant aspect of our mission, and one that is certainly evident within the Miami District Office, is that of screening and processing applicants for admission to this country. The Inspections Division of the District is responsible for 16 international ports-of-entry throughout the state of Florida and the Bahamas, including the two largest cruiseship terminal operations in

the world, those being the Ports of Miami and Ft. Lauderdale. Total international passenger counts have increased by approximately four percent in each of the last four fiscal years. In fiscal year 2001, District staff inspected 5,442,668 passengers that arrived on 13,455 passenger ships and cargo vessels at District seaports.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, the Miami Seaport has become the first in the United States to begin processing cruise vessels at a specifically designated terminal-based Federal Inspection Site. I would like now to discuss in greater detail our view of the passenger processing environments at Florida seaports.

I mentioned earlier in my testimony that the Ports of Miami and Everglades are home to some of the largest cruiseship operations in the world. As you are well aware, the impact of the cruiseship industry on the economy of this state is tremendous, accounting for billions of dollars of revenue each year. That impact is also directed towards the INS in Florida, as each year we inspect, on average, more than five million cruiseship passengers at our seaports in Miami, Port Everglades, Cape Canaveral, Tampa and Jacksonville. We are very much aware of how vitally important it is to the travelling public and the industry itself that the INS accomplish its Inspections mission in a timely and thorough manner. With the number of travelers increasing each year, and the threats to this nation's security that are now a reality, the INS understands the need to modify the inspections process to ensure that we are doing everything possible to maintain the safety of the public and of our nations borders.

I am extremely pleased to say that through the efforts of this District, our Eastern Regional Office, and INS Headquarters, and certainly with the cooperation and energy of the cruiseship companies themselves, we have implemented at the Port of Miami the same inspection process the INS uses at all air ports-of-entry in the United States. Efforts are currently underway to establish the same inspection process here at Port Everglades. We expect that we will be fully operational with this facility within three months. In addition,

construction of terminal-style facilities is underway at the Ports of Tampa and West Palm Beach. We expect to be operational with terminal-style inspections at those two facilities in a matter of months. While the advantages of such a system are many, I would like to focus on two in particular: those being the capability to immediately access real-time data to enhance the INS' ability to better protect our borders; and the ability of this new infrastructure to facilitate procedures for the traveling public.

As with airport inspection processes, our terminal-style inspection process at the Port of Miami facilitates the inspection of cruiseship passengers. I cannot overemphasize the significance of this system. In other words, every person leaving a cruiseship and entering the United States is personally inspected by an Immigration Inspector who has access to the same law enforcement and security databases found at our established facilities at air ports of entry. This occurs at what is commonly referred to as "primary inspection." It is at this stage where an Immigration Inspector has the first true opportunity to identify or detect known or suspected immigration law violators, criminals, and certainly, those who could present a threat to this country's national security. In those instances where we do encounter passengers who require more in-depth processing, a referral is made to what is called "secondary inspection." At this stage of inspection, an Immigration Inspector can take the needed time to conduct a more thorough investigation into a person's status, identity, intended travel plans, and ultimately, the individual's admissibility to the United States. These terminal-style inspections which are now being done at the Port of Miami, and soon at the other ports I mentioned, provide us with the greatest opportunity to detect and interdict persons who pose a threat to this country.

Regrettably, for cruise ships not arriving at a terminal-ready facility, INS must board the cruise ship and inspect onboard. This is still the most common form of inspection, but the least desirable. No live data hook-ups for INS exists on these ships, therefore no live queries are possible. Rather, laptop computers with downloaded data serve as the primary source of information. Because of the inadequacies associated with this procedure, INS is now examining

alternative approaches to this problem.

In the interim, one of the measures the INS has taken to bolster our abilities with onboard inspections is the use of the Automated Passenger Information System, or APIS as it is known. Within the Miami District, I am pleased to tell you that all cruise lines are now fully participating with us in the advance presentation of passenger manifest information. The availability of Advance Passenger Information enables the INS to conduct database checks of passengers prior to the arrival of a cruise ship at a port of entry.

Also as an interim measure, pending the completion of the terminal facility here at Port Everglades, the District is conducting what I will characterize as a hybrid form of terminal-style passenger processing at one of the cruiseship terminals. Under this interim hybrid process, we are using the APIS information and any potential “hits” we develop from our advance database inquiries, to conduct dockside inspections of passengers as they disembark a vessel. It is close, in concept, to the actual terminal-style inspection process. What is absent of course, is the secure, well-equipped facility in which to conduct the inspection.

The more efficient processing of passengers with terminal style cruiseship inspections has resulted in an overwhelmingly positive response from our customers, the passengers and crew of these ships. Disembarkation commences immediately upon docking as opposed to passenger remaining onboard for 3 to 4 hours while inspections are completed. This moves passenger off vessels faster, and provides for more efficient movement of ships’ goods and services, all in a highly secure and sterile environment.

In closing, let me say that with the deployment of appropriate staffing and new technology in the seaport inspections environment, passenger facilitation, thorough law enforcement, and safe, secure ports-of-entry are fully attainable goals. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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